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LITTLE SQUIRTS IN THE GREAT SOCIETY, THE SEARCH FOR THE BIG SQUEAK. RESEARCH REPORT, VOL. 4, NO. 4.

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THE DIFFERENCES THAT EXIST IN THE FAMILY TYPES AND LIFE STYLES OF THE DISADVANTAGED HAVE IMPORTANT IMPLICATIONS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF POVERTY PROGRAMS. ORGANIZED COMMUNITY EFFORTS WILL REACH AND BE MEANINGFUL ONLY FOR THE STABLE POOR. POVERTY PROGRAMS WILL NOT BE SUCCESSFUL WITH THE DISORGANIZED POOR WHO ARE ONLY MARGINALLY ADAPTED TO SOCIETY. THE MIDDLE GROUP ON THE STABLE-UNSTABLE CONTINUUM OFFERS THE GREATEST POTENTIAL FOR SUCCESSFUL PROGRAMS, PROVIDED THAT THEY HAVE A QUALITY EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE. CURRENT COMPENSATORY EDUCATION PROGRAMS WHICH DO NOT PROVIDE A LONG TERM CONTINUITY OF SERVICE FROM BIRTH TO MATURITY ARE NOT ACCEPTABLE ANTIPOVERTY EFFORTS. EDUCATIONAL PLANNERS SHOULD SEARCH FOR WAYS TO SHIFT INNER CITY SCHOOLS FROM RIGID BUREAUCRACIES TO FLEXIBLE, ACCEPTING INSTITUTIONS. PUPIL-TEACHER RATIO MUST BE LOWERED, PERHAPS BY USING NONPROFESSIONALS IN THE CLASSROOMS. CHANGES IN THE CLIMATE AND STRUCTURE OF SLUM SCHOOLS, HOWEVER, MAY BE VIEWED BY PROFESSIONALS AS THREATENING AND MAY REQUIRE HONEST CONFRONTATIONS OF INGRAINED PREJUDICES. ANOTHER PROBLEM RELATED TO ANTIPOVERTY PROGRAMS IS A KIND OF "BATTLE FATIGUE" IN POVERTY WORKERS IN DEPRESSED AREAS. THIS DISCOURAGEMENT MUST BE VENTILATED AND WORKED OUT SO THAT PROFESSIONAL EFFORTS CAN BE EFFECTIVE. THIS PAPER WAS TO BE PRESENTED AT THE 1967 ANNUAL MEETING OF THE AMERICAN ORTHOPSYCHIATRIC ASSOCIATION, MARCH 22, 1967, AT THE SESSION ENTITLED "POVERTY IN EDUCATION." (NH)

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Little Squirts in the Great Society; The Search for the Big Squeak

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Two Boys with a "Headstart"

Tyrone is five years old. He is Negro and poor. He lives in a large city public housing project with his mother and his father, a steadily employed janitor, his two older sisters and his two older brothers. He is bright, curious, and full of fun, but well-mannered and self-controlled. He plays well with his age-mates, and displays both initiative and creativity. Unlike many of his peers, he is verbally fluent, and speaks with facility. He was one of the outstanding students in the preschool he attended last year, and the teachers were very fond of him. In view of Tyrone's demonstrated competence in the preschool setting, an easy adjustment to kindergarten and a successful future academic career were anticipated for him. Tyrone's mother, when her schedule permitted, was an enthusiastic participant in the small group of mothers who met at the preschool to discuss problems of their children in particular and issues of childrearing in general. In the Fall of 1966 Tyrone entered kindergarten in the local public elementary school. His parents had not noticed anything particularly unusual about his early adjustment to the kindergarten, and were consequently taken aback when in November, a note arrived requesting that the parents come to school because Tyrone was misbehaving. It seems that the teacher had set several of her more advanced students to the task of learning how to print their names. (Tyrone had mastered this a year before when his older sister taught him how). Tyrone wrote his name several times. The teacher told him to repeat it five times more. Tyrone refused,

saying he already knew that, and he wanted to do something else. The teacher was irritated by what she interpreted as insolence, and since the boy had already shown periodic disinterest in some of the other classroom activities which he had previously mastered during preschool, but which were part of this teacher's regular kindergarten curriculum, she became angry and requested the parent conference.

Roosevelt lives in the apartment next door to Tyrone. He is five also. He is the fifth of seven children born to his 27-year-old mother who is currently pregnant and reportedly separated from her third husband, although he is seen frequently in the neighborhood. The reports of separation seem to emanate from the fact that the family is supported by Aid to Dependent Children. The mother looks older than her years, and is limited in her capacity to respond to the extensive interpersonal demands imposed by such a large brood, under conditions of slum life. During one noonday home visit by a doctor and parent coordinator from the preschool Roosevelt had recently begun to attend, she was able to muster sufficient energy to beat the boy on the bare legs with a plastic jumprope, when he whined a desire for something to eat. Both observers agreed that this beating seemed motivated largely by the mother's desire to appear in control of her children, and her wish to impress the visitors with her competence as a mother. Roosevelt attended the same preschool that Tyrone attended. He wandered around with a bland expression most of the time, showing little interest or involvement in either the play materials or the other children. He was very inhibited in his behavior, and often would appear to be holding himself in rigid

control. On occasions he would severely beat one of the stuffed dolls in the classroom suggesting that there was considerable rage that resided beneath his outward blandness. His attendance was sporadic; when he was there he almost never spoke, and then it was in a barely audible whisper. Most of the time he was ignored by his peers. His teachers confessed difficulty trying to motivate him for more than a few minutes at a time before they escaped to duties with other more responsive youngsters. The staff saw him as a very immature child who was not ready for the demands of kindergarten; they considered him a poor prospect for future academic achievement.

Despite the expenditure of considerable effort, the staff was not successful in enticing Roosevelt's mother to set foot inside the preschool or to be responsive during the several home visits that were made, much less to be actively involved in the mothers' group. Of course, there were many reality factors which were operating against her participation, e.g., her large family, her pregnant condition, her embarrassment over not having a dress "nice enough to wear to school", her lack of self-confidence in expressing herself, and her difficulty in organizing her activities in a planful manner.

Since there were no provisions for retention in the preschool, Roosevelt went on to kindergarten and is in Tyrone's class. His inhibited behavior has continued. The teacher has intended to request a conference with Roosevelt's mother, but with the many pressures of her job, has not yet done so, probably because Roosevelt's behavior, although grossly immature, is not really disruptive to her classroom routine.

The Population to be Served: Implications for Programming

The descriptions of Tyrone and Roosevelt serve to illustrate how difficult it is to generalize about "the disadvantaged". The wide range of family types to be found among the poor is truly remarkable. Although the two boys live next door to one another, and share essentially the same economic deprivations, social discriminations, group history, and current culture, they live in worlds apart. The different worlds of Tyrone and Roosevelt are determined largely by the unique contributions of their respective family experiences, which are not necessarily adequately reflected in the crude demographic measures of socioeconomic status generally cited, such as family income, educational level of parents, and recorded presence or absence of a father. Rather, when these factors are held roughly constant (such as is the case in a public housing project), the more important criteria of comparative "privilege" or "advantage" would seem to be related to such things as the parents' own experiences as children, their self-esteem, their investment in child-rearing functions as a means of self-fulfillment, their acted-upon values and standards, their capacity for self-direction and self-control, and their interpersonal styles. (4) Scheinfeld is currently studying many of these factors with the intensive field techniques of the social anthropologist. (9) Solomon et al (10) have studied specific parental reinforcement behaviors and related them to children's achievement. Hess and colleagues have reported a relationship between parental language and cognition and children's cognitive modes. (3) Although both the cognitive and affective components of experience are essential and frequently co-vary in both quality and quantity, I believe that we will ultimately find

the affective elements to be more important, especially early in life, in establishing a foundation upon which later cognitive differentiation may occur.

Gross variations in family characteristics (interacting of course to some extent with individual differences among siblings of the same family) have been found in our experience to be the major determiners of the quality and quantity of involvement which clientele bring to poverty programs.

Those programs which demand an intense level of involvement and participation are possible only with the "more-privileged" segment of the "disadvantaged", whereas they are grossly incompatible with the predispositions of the "less-privileged" portion of the group. Almost by definition, therefore, we can assume that War on Poverty programs have reached the "more-privileged" segment of the poor, i.e., when privilege is defined by the more subtle family criteria expressed a few moments ago.

The most underprivileged families display a degree of disorganization that precludes their participation in any organized community effort, and, indeed, almost any individual endeavor. These people are marginal in their adaptation even to lower class life; their associations are fraught with suspicion and distrust; their personal problems consume virtually all of their available energies (6, 5). The children of these families are least likely to appear for programs of compensatory education, even if by virtue of an unusual effort by a community agency they are initially enrolled in the program. Tyrone, for example, missed one day of school for the entire semester; Roosevelt, who by any standards could be seen as "needing" school more, was absent about 50% of the time. In

addition, many of the children who are functioning poorly (such as Roosevelt) are ill-equipped for full participation in the traditional classroom, even after a "Headstart", a "Pushup", or a "Mobilization". If Poverty Programs are aimed only at this end of the lower class continuum, the cards are stacked in the direction of "failure" outcomes. Conversely, if such programs are aimed at families such as that of Tyrone's, the likelihood of "successful" outcome is greatly enhanced.

Of course, such "success" may be spurious victory, in the sense that many youngsters "making it" into the middle class from the more privileged segments of the lower class might likely have succeeded on their own, as their counterparts had been doing for decades before the War on Poverty. This fact notwithstanding, in addition there will certainly be many who will have been helped significantly and crucially by the experiences provided under the poverty programs. At the present state of our capacity for prediction of outcome, prior to the start of an intervention, the group which would have "made it anyway" is indistinguishable from the group definitely needing the extra help provided in order to succeed.

At the lowest end of the continuum, in work with the most disorganized segments of the lower class community, there have been no programs which can claim success in the absolute sense, although a number of projects report very limited gains for some of their participants. In view of the multitude of factors which can account for the limited gains, is it not unreasonable to expect any more than this?

We are left,then to consider the possibilities and potentialities for programs involving the middle group on the disadvantage continuum.

In many ways this is the most challenging group. It is my impression that it is also numerically the largest. Its people have some strengths and some weaknesses; they could potentially move either up or down the mobility scale. Their outcome depends primarily on the quality of the education experience which they encounter. It is here, with this middle group, where the major present-day and future battles in the War on Poverty will be won or lost.

Evaluation of Poverty Programs in Education

Recently, Gordon and Wilkerson have emphasized the need for rigorous appraisal of the effectiveness of programs in the field of education for the disadvantaged. (2) They list the many impediments to adequate evaluation of even modest programs of compensatory education. In view of these limitations, we must await a more thorough and sophisticated appraisal of our efforts, which may take perhaps a generation or more. By that time we are likely to have other indicators of our success or failure as judged by the very stability of our social system as it evolves over time.

In the meantime, in the opinion of this observer, Poverty programs in education could thus far be likened to attempting to overhaul an engine by means of a periodic squirt from an oil can. Most of the programs of so-called "compensatory education" have been hastily conceived and loosely administered. Emphasis has been on "getting off the ground", rather than on "Where are we going?" Consequently, most programs under the Economic Opportunity Act and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, and others financed through public and private funds have been

characterized by fragmentation, discontinuity, limitation in scope, and/or the obsessive repetition of failures formerly financed by local school funds, but which are now placed in a slightly more attractive package so as to become eligible for the new special funding.

Because of the very nature of the developmental process, piecemeal programs without adequate provision for follow-up cannot be considered acceptable. Ongoing needs extending from birth to maturity (and beyond) demand the development of programs of long-term involvement, to include adequate provisions of continuity of service as the children move from one age group to another, and from one context of the child's experience to another, i.e., at minimum including home, school and community approaches.

Richmond, the Director of Project Headstart, has this year called for the establishment of day-care centers, to begin with children at age six months, so as to supplement the experience provided by the less-privileged lower class home, and, in effect, more adequately to prepare children for the preschool experience available under Project Headstart. (8) Preschool, in turn, is the prelude to elementary school, and so on up the developmental cycle. There is clear need for follow-up programs to supplement the gains made through earlier programs as well as the necessity to involve multiple facets of the child's life in the process of growth. Consequently, programs designed to reach the home have more than casual importance. Our second preschool friend, Roosevelt, for example, carries a guarded prognosis largely for the reason that we have not yet been able to devise a method which would significantly influence his family experience.

Meanwhile, there is a distinct possibility that the preschool program he attended, which encouraged the expression of aggression, the use of words for communication, and the display of individual initiative, was really a source of additional conflict for Roosevelt; such behavior manifested in the home setting warrants a thorough "whupping". Similarly, for Tyrone, who seems eminently qualified for kindergarten achievement, the preschool experience in the absence of follow-up with the kindergarten teacher in such a way as to prepare her for such students has placed him in a difficult position. Having come to preschool functioning ahead of his peers, and benefitting greatly from the freedom and the reward for initiative provided in the preschool setting, Tyrone is understandably confused when he discovers that the same verbal fluency and display of initiative for which he gained approval at preschool is interpreted as insolence in the kindergarten; by threatening the adequacy of the teacher he has caused himself to be made the target of the teacher's aggression. For the first time in his life he is viewed as a problem child. The strong support provided for Tyrone from his family will hopefully mitigate in the long run the deleterious effect of this teacher's attitude toward his educational attainments. But how many of such rebuffs can be endured before a child comes to view mediocrity and passivity as those characteristics to be most highly valued?

Poverty Programs and Inner City Schools

In much the same way that we have highlighted the broad spectrum of family characteristics which can be observed, we also must conclude that there is remarkable variation in the character of the institutions and in

the predispositions of the personnel who service the educational needs of the poverty class.

No discussion designed to give an overview of educational programs for the poor can afford to omit the unfortunate reality that many of the schools which exist in the inner city are "multi-problem schools" characterized by too-strict adherence to a bureaucratic power structure, and which sometimes openly oppose individual initiative on the part of teachers, discourage communication with individual parents and/or representatives of the community as a whole, and exist as encapsulated islands of middle class self-righteousness in the midst of the lower class slum. Conversely, there are schools which may be located immediately adjacent to such a problem school which could be characterized as flexible, imaginative, and creative in matters of curriculum, teaching style, and classroom management, which openly solicit parent participation and community involvement, and which are considered major bastions of individual growth, and an integral part of the community.

Among the many factors which determine where a school fits in this continuum, are the personality predispositions of the principal, the level of his security in his job and his self-confidence in himself, his identification and empathy with the problems of the children and the community, and the breadth of his definition of his role as "educator".

The same spectrum of competence said to apply with reference to principals exists in respect to the qualifications of teachers in coping with the task of teaching in the inner city classroom. The most effective teachers are often found to be present in classrooms located just next

door to classes headed by teachers who on any criterion one wishes to choose could be referred to as "hard-to-reach teachers". Such teachers are likely to be inflexible; they have difficulty in classroom management either by being too authoritarian or too permissive, have low expectations of their students, and make no attempt at individualizing their approach to students, often because they are personally threatened by real involvement with them. Zamoff has written with sarcastic and ironic tones of such teachers whom he refers to as "the attitudinally disadvantaged". (11)

Just how the inner city school is going to shift into being an effective educational institution in the face of a significant proportion of these "hard-to-reach" personnel should be at present a matter of highest priority for educational planners. The current climate admits some degree of optimism, since these days one is apt to hear increasing restlessness from within the educational establishment itself. The problem of removing or re-orienting the "dead wood" firmly entrenched within the bureaucracy is only one of the problems, however.

Of the myriad problems of reorganization to be faced, the issue of pupil/teacher ratio must have high priority. Many educators have felt that the number of students per teacher, even in the most advantaged suburban systems, should be lowered. The great needs for individualized attention and instruction, and the classroom chaos which often results when these are not present, clearly dictate that in the inner city we must see drastic reductions in the size of classroom groupings.

Current professional personnel shortages would seem to exclude this as a possibility. Pearl, Reissman, and others have offered one possible

solution to these shortages. (7, 1) They suggest the recruitment and training of thousands of so-called "indigenous non-professionals" to take over certain administrative and teaching functions in close collaboration with and under the supervision of the fully-trained classroom teacher. The experience of our research group at the Henry Horner Preschool Center in Chicago* has been very favorable in this regard. We have developed a cadre of assistant teachers who function at a very high level. Mothers of more successful students form a ready source of supply. Such a proposal, however, carries with it certain inherent difficulties, such as threats to the professional status of the teacher, inter-professional rivalries, jealousies and resentments, and vagueness or ambiguousness with respect to the assignment of classroom roles and responsibilities. Relationships among teachers and the assistant teachers must be painfully negotiated and constantly re-evaluated, in the spirit of effecting the best possible learning climate for the youngsters involved. Often status considerations arising out of differing educational qualifications are confounded with pre-existing stereotypes and feelings arising out of deeply ingrained racial or social class attitudes and prejudice. These issues must be aired openly and repeatedly in order for staff to work smoothly in the educational task with the children. Difficult though it may be, it is possible to be done.

Battle Fatigue in the War on Poverty

While on the subject of interpersonal dynamics among personnel in

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the War on Poverty, it would be well for us to mention a syndrome which is observed frequently among staff members working in depressed areas and with socially disadvantaged populations: something we might term "battle fatigue in the War on Poverty". It is a phenomenon which can be observed with case workers, teachers, juvenile officers, mental health workers, school nurses, and others who provide services to poverty populations. It is manifest by periodic states of depression and fatigue, accompanied by acute feelings of hopelessness concerning potential success at the job which has been undertaken. The more intense the initial philosophical dedication of the person to the moral issue of wishing to aid the poor, grapple with social injustice, etc., the more likely is the tendency for the reaction to be a severe one. There are a number of methods that may be used to defend oneself from the effects of this syndrome: one way is to withdraw from the job, and this can vary from the mild form of having a periodic "off day", in which one emotionally takes the day off, to the more severe forms of withdrawal manifest in the acceptance of an "easier job" in the suburbs. Another way of defending oneself from thoughts of personal inadequacy is to project all of the blame for the currently felt failure on factors outside of oneself, for which in the difficult social situation of the inner city one can find adequate external support. Surely, there are things that can be cited as being "wrong" about disadvantaged children, or their parents, or their neighborhoods. However, we must also honestly examine our own roles in the situation. The task of introspection in a situation providing few opportunities or rewards for introspection, can be a formidable undertaking.

The "treatment" for this "battle fatigue" lies first in the necessary respite offered by week-ends and holidays preferably away from the neighborhood of the school, in the recognition of this syndrome as one of the hazards of work in disadvantaged areas; also in the support of colleagues and friends in frank discussion of these feelings, in the spirit first of deriving strength from the knowledge that almost everyone has felt the same feelings (and many times repeatedly), and second in the hope that more experienced confreres may be able to suggest techniques and approaches which were not necessarily taught in teachers college, but which have been found to be useful in working with this population in the setting of this school.

Through the process of observing his own deep reactions of personal futility the professional may come to understand the withdrawal from involvement or the blaming of others (which are often described as virtually exclusive properties of the poor) as manifestations of the chronic frustration and overwhelming life stress under which the poor live. Being either a child or a parent under extremely negative conditions leads to feelings of hopelessness. This feeling, which often pervades the atmosphere in poverty areas, is communicable not only from parent to child, but also from student to teacher, or client to worker. An understanding of the dynamics of his own battle fatigue helps the professional to carry on in the face of this adversity, so that he may deal more effectively with the hopelessness of the people he is serving.

Concluding Remarks

Time does not permit further exploration of various other considerations

germane to our theme: Poverty Programs in Education.

This brief communication has attempted to illustrate how characteristics of the schools which administer programs, the nature and diversity of the population to be served, and the educational tasks at hand provide cause for mild optimism, considerable pessimism, and much skepticism regarding poverty programs in education as they have thus far evolved.

Nevertheless, the War on Poverty must go on. Indeed, we must prepare ourselves for the realization that the waging of this war is likely to consume much of the resources and the energies of the next two generations of Americans.

We must move speedily to apply what knowledge we do have about these matters. We must also, with resourcefulness and imagination, seek out alternative approaches and new solutions to these old and distressing problems.

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